



# CRISIS OF WOMEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY: LOOKING FOR POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The issue of women's crisis in the 21st century has become a pressing concern that requires immediate attention. Despite the tremendous progress that has been made towards women's rights, the advancements made so far are far from being satisfactory. Women in the 21st century face a multitude of crises, ranging from gender-based violence to economic inequality, limited access to healthcare, education, and political representation. The current state of affairs calls for a comprehensive exploration of the various dimensions of the crisis faced by women in the 21st century.

To address this issue, it is important to recognize the importance of English literature in understanding and finding solutions to the challenges faced by women. Literature offers a window into the lives of women and highlights their struggles, achievements, and aspirations. In this article, we will examine how English literature can provide insights into the crisis of women in the 21st century and suggest possible solutions.

**KEYWORDS:** Women's Crisis, 21st Century, English Literature

## INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has witnessed significant progress in the empowerment of women worldwide. Women have broken barriers in various fields, shattered stereotypes, and have paved the way for future generations of women. However, despite these advances, women still face an array of crises that impede their progress and potential. These crises have numerous causes, from patriarchal attitudes to systemic discrimination and entrenched gender biases. In this article, we will examine the various crises of women in the 21st century and explore possible solutions through the lens of English literature.

### Gender-Based Violence:

Gender-based violence is a major crisis facing women in the 21st century. The United Nations defines gender-based violence as "any act of violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." (United Nations, 2015)

Gender-based violence can take many forms, from domestic violence to sexual harassment and assault, forced marriages, and female genital mutilation. According to the World Health Organization, one in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. (World Health Organization, 2021) Gender-based violence has a severe impact on women's physical and mental health and their overall quality of life.

English literature has been instrumental in bringing attention to gender-based violence and advocating for women's rights.

Through powerful narratives, literature has been able to shine a light on the devastating impact of patriarchal attitudes and gender-based violence on women's lives. Novels such as "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and "The Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood have been particularly impactful in raising awareness about gender-based violence and inspiring feminist movements.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a short story that tells the story of a woman who is confined to her room by her husband, who is a physician. The woman is suffering from postpartum depression, but her husband dismisses her symptoms and insists that she rest in her room. The woman becomes fixated on the yellow wallpaper in her room, and as her mental state deteriorates, the wallpaper becomes a symbol of her entrapment and oppression. The story has been interpreted as a critique of the medical profession's treatment of women, as well as a commentary on the social constraints placed on women during the 19th century.

Similarly, "The Handmaid's Tale" is a dystopian novel set in a future where the United States has been taken over by a theocratic dictatorship. The story follows a woman named Offred, who is forced to become a "handmaid" and bear children for the ruling class. The novel explores themes of reproductive rights, sexual violence, and the dangers of religious extremism. The book has been widely read and has become a symbol of feminist resistance to authoritarianism and gender-based violence.

While literature has been instrumental in raising awareness about gender-based violence, it is also important to take concrete action to combat this issue. Governments and civil society organizations need to take urgent action to address

gender-based violence. This includes implementing laws and policies that criminalize gender-based violence and provide support services such as shelters and counseling for survivors. Education and awareness-raising campaigns can also help change social attitudes towards gender-based violence and promote gender equality.

In addition to government action, it is also important for individuals to speak out against gender-based violence and advocate for women's rights. This can include supporting organizations that work to combat gender-based violence, challenging patriarchal attitudes and behaviors, and promoting gender equality in personal and professional settings. By working together, we can create a society that values the safety and dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender.

### **Economic Inequality:**

Economic inequality is another significant crisis facing women in the 21st century. Women are more likely than men to live in poverty, earn less for the same work, and have limited access to credit and financial resources. The gender pay gap remains a persistent problem, with women earning on average 16% less than men globally. (World Economic Forum, 2021)

English literature has a rich tradition of exploring the impact of economic inequality on women's lives. Novels such as Elizabeth Gaskell's "Mary Barton" and Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" offer insights into the struggles faced by working-class women in the 19th century. These novels highlight the need for economic and social reform to address the systemic barriers that limit women's opportunities.

"Mary Barton" depicts the plight of working-class women in Manchester during the Industrial Revolution. The novel explores the impact of poverty and unemployment on women's lives, their struggles to provide for their families, and their limited opportunities for social mobility. The novel also highlights the importance of collective action and social reform to address economic inequality. For example, Mary's father becomes involved in a workers' strike to demand better wages and working conditions, reflecting the growing awareness of workers' rights in the 19th century.

Similarly, "Jane Eyre" portrays the struggles of a young woman from a poor background who works as a governess to make a living. The novel explores the challenges faced by women who are forced to rely on others for their economic survival, and the limited options available to them. For example, Jane is offered marriage proposals from men who offer financial security, but she refuses to compromise her principles and values. The novel highlights the importance of self-reliance and independence for women, and the need for social reform to address the structural barriers that limit their opportunities.

To address economic inequality, governments and employers need to take action to ensure equal pay for equal work. Women continue to earn less than men for the same job, and this gender pay gap perpetuates economic inequality. Employers need to implement policies and practices that promote gender equality,

such as transparent salary structures, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and flexible work arrangements.

Another solution to address economic inequality is to increase women's access to credit and financial resources. Women often have limited access to credit and are more likely to be excluded from financial services. Governments and financial institutions need to design policies and products that cater to women's needs and promote financial inclusion. Microfinance and other innovative financial products can also help women access capital and start their own businesses.

Affordable childcare and parental leave are also critical to address economic inequality. Women are often forced to choose between their career and family responsibilities, and this limits their opportunities for economic advancement. Governments and employers need to provide affordable childcare and parental leave to support working parents, particularly women, and enable them to balance their work and family responsibilities.

Finally, education and training programs can help women access higher-paying jobs and break the cycle of poverty. Governments and employers need to invest in education and training programs that promote women's skills and capabilities, and enable them to access better-paying jobs. These programs need to be designed to address the specific needs of women, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and promote gender equality.

In conclusion, economic inequality remains a critical issue facing women in the 21st century. English literature offers valuable insights into the impact of economic inequality on women's lives and highlights the need for social and economic reform. To address economic inequality, governments, and employers need to take action to ensure equal pay for equal work, increase women's access to credit and financial resources, provide affordable childcare and parental leave, and invest in education and training programs. By working towards greater economic equality, we can create a more just and equitable society for all.

### **Lack of Access to Healthcare and Education:**

Access to healthcare and education is critical for women's well-being and empowerment. However, many women in the 21st century still lack access to these basic services, particularly in developing countries. According to UNICEF, million girls worldwide are out of school, and women make up two-thirds of the world's illiterate population. (UNICEF, 2021) Lack of access to healthcare can also have devastating consequences for women's health, with maternal mortality rates remaining high in many parts of the world.

In English literature many Novels such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Half of a Yellow Sun" and Nawal El Saadawi's "Woman at Point Zero," we are given a glimpse into the barriers to education and healthcare that women face in developing countries. These novels advocate for change and offer women in accessing education and healthcare.

To address the lack of access to healthcare and education for women, governments and international organizations must prioritize investment in these areas. The importance of education for women cannot be overstated as it is a fundamental right that has the potential to improve the lives of women and their communities. Investing in schools and providing scholarships and other forms of support to girls and women is crucial in ensuring that they have the opportunity to receive an education. Addressing cultural barriers that prevent girls from attending school, such as early marriage, and gender-based violence is also critical in ensuring that girls and women can access education.

Furthermore, investing in healthcare is equally crucial in empowering women. Providing access to healthcare facilities and trained healthcare professionals can significantly improve women's health outcomes. Women often face unique health challenges, such as pregnancy-related complications, that require specialized care. By providing access to healthcare, women can receive treatment for these health issues, leading to improved health outcomes, and ultimately, empowerment.

Governments and international organizations must also prioritize the training and employment of women in the healthcare sector. By increasing the number of women employed in healthcare, we can improve the quality of care provided to women, as female healthcare providers can offer more empathetic and culturally sensitive care. Moreover, this would increase the economic opportunities available to women, leading to greater economic empowerment.

In short, the crisis of women in the 21st century is complex, and the lack of access to education and healthcare is one of the critical issues faced by women globally. English literature has played a crucial role in highlighting this issue and advocating for change. By prioritizing investment in education and healthcare, governments and international organizations can empower women and ensure that they have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

### **Political Underrepresentation:**

Despite progress in women's political representation in recent years, women remain significantly underrepresented in political decision-making processes worldwide. Women hold only 24% of parliamentary seats globally, and only 22 countries have a female head of state or government. (United Nations Women, 2021)

English literature has highlighted the importance of women's political participation and representation. Novels such as Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" and Toni Morrison's "Beloved" explore the barriers to women's political participation and the need for women's voices to be heard in the public sphere. If we talk about "A Room of One's Own" it is a feminist text that argues for the importance of women's financial and intellectual independence as a prerequisite for their participation in the public sphere. Woolf argues that women need a space of their own and the financial resources to pursue their interests, whether it be in writing or politics.

In her novel, Woolf laments the fact that women's voices have been silenced throughout history and calls for the recognition of women's achievements in the arts and politics.

Similarly, Toni Morrison's "Beloved" explores the theme of political underrepresentation among African American women. The novel depicts the struggles of the protagonist, Sethe, who is a former slave and a mother trying to protect her children from the horrors of slavery. Through Sethe's experiences, Morrison highlights the challenges faced by African American women in asserting their political voice and the need for their representation in the public sphere.

To address political underrepresentation, governments and political parties need to take action to increase women's political participation and representation. One possible solution is to implement quotas for women's representation in political positions. Quotas have been successful in increasing women's representation in many countries, including Rwanda, which has the highest percentage of women in parliament in the world. Quotas can help to address the structural and cultural barriers that limit women's political participation and provide a pathway for women to gain political experience and visibility.

Providing training and support for women in politics is another important solution. Women face unique challenges in politics, including sexism, harassment, and the burden of caregiving responsibilities. Training and support programs can help women to develop the skills and confidence needed to succeed in politics and provide a support network to help them overcome these challenges.

Addressing cultural and structural barriers to women's political participation is also crucial. Many societies still hold deeply ingrained stereotypes about women's roles in society and politics, and these need to be challenged and dismantled. Structural barriers, such as the lack of affordable childcare, also limit women's ability to participate in politics. Addressing these barriers can help to create a more inclusive and diverse political sphere that better reflects the needs and interests of all citizens.

To summarize, English literature has played a vital role in highlighting the importance of women's political participation and representation. Through novels such as "A Room of One's Own" and "Beloved," we can gain insights into the barriers that limit women's political participation and the need for their voices to be heard in the public sphere. To address political underrepresentation, governments and political parties need to take action to increase women's political participation and representation, including implementing quotas, providing training and support, and addressing cultural and structural barriers. By creating a more inclusive and diverse political sphere, we can ensure that all voices are heard and that the needs and interests of all citizens are represented.

### **CONCLUSION**

The multifaceted crisis of women in the 21st century requires urgent attention and action from governments, civil society organizations, and individuals. Gender-based violence, in

particular, is a pervasive and systemic problem that affects women globally. According to the World Health Organization, one in three women worldwide has experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. Literature can play a vital role in raising awareness about the impact of violence on women's lives and advocating for their rights.

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